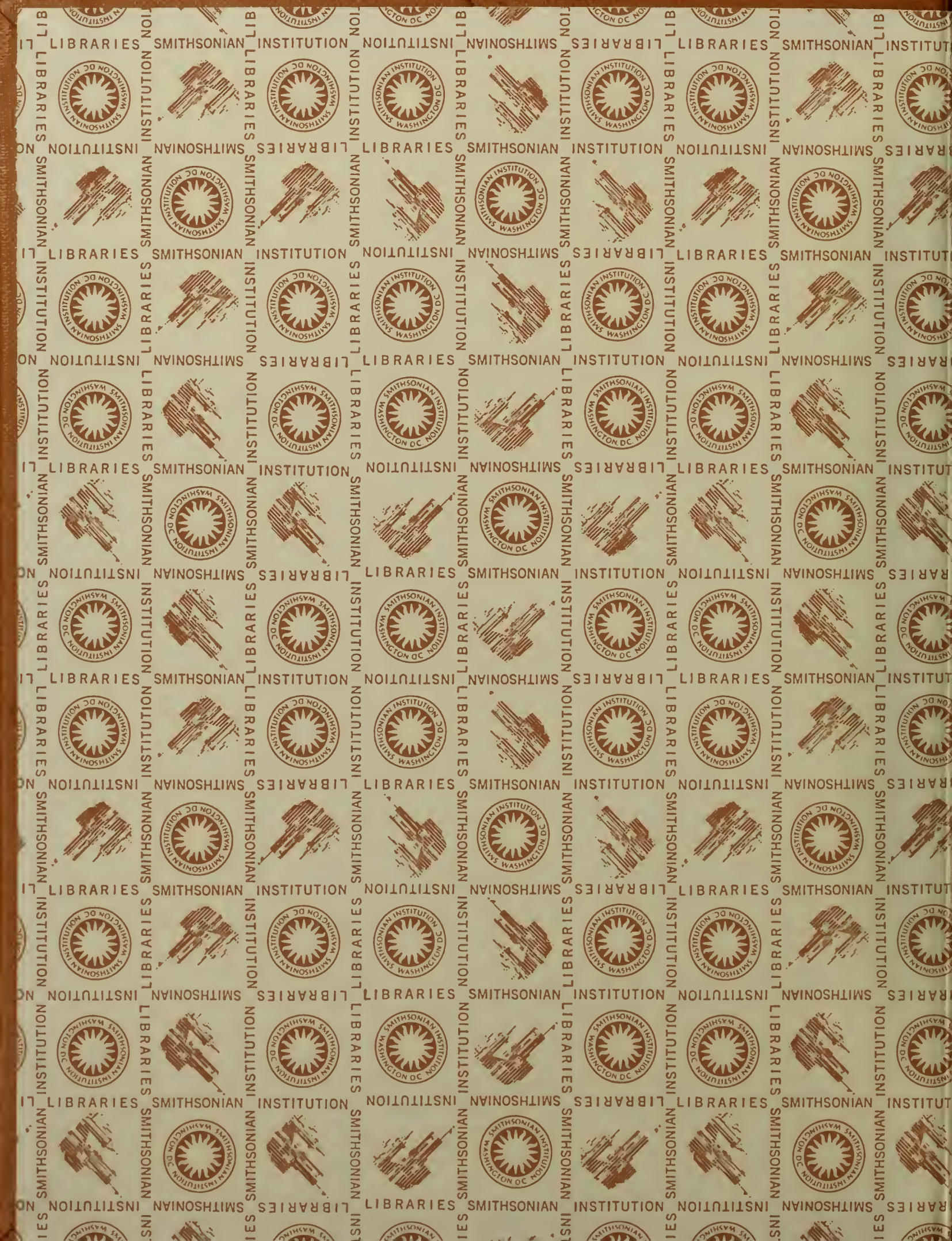
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WILLIAM HENRY CLAPP, AMERICAN GENIUS OF IMPRESSIONISM REDISCOVERED

by Lawrence Jeppson

Before the last Great War art winds changed slowly. No fad could leap the Atlantic on contrails of international jets. No esthetic revolution could sweep up the world and then perish like a spent epidemic within a decade. Art concepts sank tentative roots, grew painfully, flowered, spread...then ultimately weakened and were crowded out. It was a drawn process in which the best never quite died but mutated in natural evolution. An art movement turning brown in its original field might still be only a seedling in another.

Radical innovation was not a cult. Artists were not expected to bathe themselves in four or five fads in career course.

Impressionism, born a century ago in France, took 30, 40, 50 years to naturalize in North America. And yet some of today's art historians, infected with the virus of the novelty cult, pay heed to only the first, plow, the pioneer. No genius, they allege, could come from this field after 1900. They give scant credit to the horticulturalist who did come later to breed, cross-breed, adapt, and purify--simply because he came

later. Since he came later he could not be original. Since he could not be original he could not be much good. So the circle says, so erroneously.

In America, too, the native Impressionists who have crowded most of the artbooks have had one obvious--but usually undiagnosed--commonality. They had studios on the Eastern Seaboard, close to Philadelphia and New York, where they had easy access to the national art establishment. Local boys got the glory, the standing, the preemptive notoriety. Myopic, chauvinistic, poorly financed, art publications seldom acknowledged that talent lay elsewhere. Nor was there much in the way of museums and art galleries in the hinterlands. Good painters from these far reaches were simply ignored. They had little way to pierce the Eastern establishment. They would have to wait for history to catch up--long after they were dead.

William Henry Clapp was both a follower and a pioneer. He was a horticulturalist, a measured scientist who took what Impressionism and Post-Impressionism had to say--which he found in the original French fields of cultivation--and then cross-bred and pollinated and shared his seeds in Canada and California.

To be sure, chronologically Clapp was a follower. He was a generation younger than Monet, Renoir, Degas. His painting, though, never aped their styles, nor the styles of any other Frenchman. He was almost the same age as Bonnard and Vuillard. The term follower should be no more derisory for him than it is for them.

Clapp was a pioneer because he took his Impressionist vision into lands which were still overgrown with an earlier academia. Nearly 40 years after the first exhibition of Impressionism in France was forced to close because of public derision, the message of this new esthetic had not penetrated public Canada. Clapp, back from four or five years of

study and painting abroad, found his Impressionism too extreme for his native Montreal. The only sympathetic newspaper critic wrote, "Clapp paints what he thinks he sees, and is not obsessed by what others see or think they see."

Neither his art nor a sympathetic critic could convince the public. He found favor with his peers--but no one else. After two years in Cuba, Clapp fled to East Bay, 1917, where for the rest of his life he painted his landscapes and nudes as he saw them, became guiding light and theoretician for a closeknit Society of Six, and for more than three decades ran a city museum, the Oakland Art Gallery, in an upstairs corner of the Municipal Auditorium.

Clapp deserves credit as a pioneer, too, because in his years of museum stewardship he made certain that every legitimate art viewpoint, no matter how much in conflict with his own, had opportunity to search an audience. To make sure of this he invented a three-jury system to judge conservative, modern, and radical art for the annual exhibitions. At one point hysterical women threatened almost to tear the museum apart stone by stone unless certain nude paintings were removed. Clapp stood by his guns. Quietly fearless, he was the first museum director in the United States to give exhibition to the Blue Four--Jawlensky, Feininger, Klee, and Kandinsky; and he made his museum in the years thereafter the launching platform for American forays by this group.

Yet William Henry Clapp is best seen today as the horticulturalist who took the seeds he brought from Europe and bred them so successfully to California light and vitality that they transcended regionalism and became part of a universal world of exquisite beauty.

William Henry Clapp's American parents were living in Montreal when their son was born on October 29, 1879. They moved back to Massachusetts in 1883, but two years later everyone crossed the continent to Oakland, California--until for unknown reasons in an unknown year they returned East. America or Canada? All these early meanderings are still hazy. In a letter typed to Ferdinand Perret in 1940 Clapp said, "I have the bad habit of seldom thinking of my past, and for this reason could not answer your questions from memory, but had to consult old documents that were rather difficult to find." In the same letter he erroneously gave his birth year as 1882.

What art formation he obtained as a teenager remains a mystery. In 1900--he was 21--he began studying painting in Montreal with William Brymner in the school of Montreal Art Association. He must have been exceptionally gifted, for a year of study brought him a three-year scholarship.

Brymner is an interesting figure in Canadian art history. Although he studied in France at least four times between 1878-1903--once staying four years--he was not influenced by Impressionism. In fact, when he was in Giverny, Monet's home, in 1902, the only impression Brymner offered was, "He has a house, gardens, and automobile." Another decade passed before Brymner began painting in the Impressionistmanner, and then he did so because of the influence of Clapp, Clarence Gagnon, and A. Y. Jackson, after the three of them had come back from France.

In summer, 1903, Clapp drifted down the St. Lawrence river to Baie St. Paul, Charlevoix, in Quebec province. There, with Gagnon, his close friend, he lived a Spartan existence not far from the river in an unpainted clapboard cabin which belonged to an American Impressionist, Frederick Porter Vinton. Clapp's style hadn't yet broken free. He was still a Brymner conservative, but those days were numbered.

In 1904 Clapp left Canada for the Academie Julian in Paris. If Gagnon wasn't on the same boat with Clapp, they both at least arrived at the Julian about the same time. There both studied under Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921), whose quick claim in art history is to enormous academic murals found in the Panthéon, the Hotel de Ville in Paris, and the Capitole in Toulouse. The scale was a far cry from Clapp's natural feeling for the intimate.

Instead Clapp became intensely interested in the work of Signac and Seurat. Seurat was already dead prematurely, but Signac was only 16 years older than Clapp and very much alive, as were Monet, Degas, Renoir, Guillaumin, and (until 1906) Cézanne. Albert Marquet and Kees Van Dongen, like the Russian Larianov, were very much Clapp's Paris contemporaries. Research has not yet established how many of these painters Clapp met, but the influence of Monet, Signac, and Seurat certainly outweighed Laurens.

Although Clapp also studied in the Academie Colarossi and the Ecole de la Grande Chaumière until 1908--with Delecius, Lucien Simon, Royer, Jules Lefebvre, and others--he did not confine himself to Paris. He made a trip to Spain his first year in Europe. Like the Impressionists he had need for the tranquility of the countryside. For a while in 1906 he was living in the Hotel des Couronnes, Chézy-sur Marne, a village only

five kilometers downstream from a town that a decade later would become forever anchored in military history, Chateau Thierry. The next year back in Paris he lodged at 3 rue Vercingetorix, a stone's throw from the walled Cemetery of Montparnasse and the Gaieté music hall. Throughout his career Clapp reveled in painting female figure studies--reclining and standing nudes, nymphs bathing in forest pools, beach scenes. One looks vainly for men. Like Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, he occasionally painted dancing girls, but only a few of these pictures have surfaced.

In 1907 he made a second trip to Spain, which produced A Road in Spain (in The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) and Morning in Spain (the National Gallery of Canada).

He was not without success in Paris. He was accepted for hanging in various salons, including the 1908 Salon d'Automne, where he joined Monet, Renoir, and Bonnard. During moments of depression throughout his life Clapp would wish he could return to his friends in Paris who talked his language. These friends included a small band of venturesome Canadians, including Jackson, who congregated at Gagnon's luminous studio at 9 rue Falguière. One can easily visualize Gagnon's elegantly coiffed wife, Kathrynne, gliding about the studio in her floor-length, billowing Chinese robe serving everyone afternoon tea.

Before returning to Canada Clapp went to Belgium to paint. There are pictures extant painted on paperboard purchased in Flanders. Then he went back to Spain to paint and to study in the Prado.

Clapp's exact movements for the next seven years are not completely clear. In April, 1908 he was exhibited at the Royal Canadian Academy of Fine Arts, but perhaps he shipped his paintings from Europe prior to his return. A brochure he wrote later for his California art school (1918-1924) said that he studied in the Prado in 1909. This may be an error, since at the 1908 exhibit the Montreal Art Association awarded him the Jessie

Dow prize worth $250 for his study Spanish Garden, as the best Canadian picture that year. It was subsequently bought by the Dominion government.

Clapp attempted New York City (172 E. 75th Street) for a few months in 1909 and was there exhibited in the National Academy of Design. But in 1910 he was back to try Montreal again, at 2372 Nance Street.

Far ahead of Canadian taste, Clapp had returned from Paris an avowed Pointillist. Joan Murray, director of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery and organizer of Impressionism in Canada, says Clapp "brought back to Canada a virtuoso handling [that reveals] a technique tending toward neo-Impressionism." (1974). Clapp "proceeded to paint landscapes of the Sainte-Famille and other Quebec districts. He experimented by using brilliant splashes of unbroken color, and stylistically he falls between Impressionism and Pointillism. Montreal laughed. One critic only, Laberge, appreciated what he was trying to do." (J. Russel Harper, Painting in Canada, A History)

This is the period of In the Orchard, Quebec , and Lumber Boats (Art Gallery of Hamilton); Rain, Eastern Canada (Art Gallery of Windsor); and The New Church (National Gallery of Canada.)

It was probably Laberge who wrote,

> Clapp paints what he thinks he sees, and is not obssessed by what others see or think they see. He is concerned with light and color transfiguring form, to which light and color are subsidiary. He has a love for mist and mystical in which a dimly-lighted, warm nude figure, exquisitely modelled, sometimes suggests a classical story--of a Hero watching for a Leander or what not--and finally he can assemble reds and yellows and blues on a canvas in a way that would make a Monticelli ashamed.

Commenting on the Dow-prize picture by a "youth of 30", the critic said, "...the warmth and glow and heat that were reflected in that canvas may be found in a more or less degree in all his work today. Mr. Clapp bids fair to make notable contributions to Canadian Art."

But...Laberge's perception was unique among critics.

Other Canadian artists who had studied in France were treated with equal ill will. A. Y. Jackson, who had been another of Brymner's students, writing from Paris in 1912 about the rejection of Clapp's works said that he supposed Montreal "still laughs at Clapp, the loud empty laugh which speaks the vacant mind, but they will learn when all are dead."

If public Montreal laughed, a number of his influential peers did not. In 1911 they honored him by electing him an Associate of the Royal Canadian Academy. But still he had to give lessons in drawing and painting to survive.

In 1912 he made a second American exhibit foray. Sunset in Arcadia was hung in the 16th Exhibition of the Carnegie Institute. It did not win any prize. In fact, in the Perret letter the highest prize he could recall ever winning was the 1908 Dow prize. Perhaps modesty led him to not mention that The Open Gate won first prize among progressive canvasses at the Oakland Art Gallery annual in 1927. He also exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. In 1912 and 1913 he was part of the spring exhibits of the Montreal Art Association. In 1912 he was invited to exhibit by the Canadian Art Club, of which he became a formal member in 1913.

Indeed, the high mark of his Canadian career came in November of 1913. William Henry Clapp, 34, took part in the 35th Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Fine Arts, and, more importantly, was elected to full membership in that body. It was an honor he never regretted.

In 1914 he was again exhibited by the Academy, and he had one-man shows in the Art Club and in Johnson's Art Galleries. R. W. Pilot, Royal Canadian Academy, recalls Clapp:

> My own recollections of this artist are centered in the impact of a one-man exhibition of his pictures held in the Arts Club, Montreal in 1914 or 1915. The freshness of his pallette and his joyful interpretation of the Spanish countryside was a great spur to many of the painters in Montreal, and he appeared as "a new voice" on the scene of Canadian painting--invigorating and inspiring to the younger painters.
>
> I remember that he held a class of painting in Montreal which was highly thought of and which by his teaching had a considerable influence...my own early enthusiasm for his Spanish work has never diminished.
>
> --Letter to Ginger Laky, 7 September 1967

At Johnson's Clapp offered 100 paintings ranging from $75 to $400. As for Canada, though, this was Clapp's last breath. In 1915 he forsook Montreal.

Like so many things in the first 40 years of Clapp's life, too little data has come to light yet as to the totality of reasons for Clapp's departure. Russel Harper says Clapp was unable to withstand the opposition and went to Jamaica to study light. Obviously Clapp had not been a commercial success. But what last straw, exactly, triggered the move? One can imagine a dozen reasons ranging from a desire for warmer climate to an unhappy love affair. Pilot thinks he left for reasons of health. One must also consider the times. Clapp was 36 and probably carried dual citizenship. Born in Montreal, the Canadians could claim him, and Canada, an integral part of the British Empire, had gone to war. In times of such national stress Clapp was not beyond military age. While the Compulsory Military Service Act met considerable opposition and was not considered especially effective, more than 600,000 Canadians saw military service, three-quarters of them overseas. Even if not threatened by conscription he must have felt ill at ease among friends and students going off to beat the Kaiser. But it was not an American war yet, and Americans from President Wilson down were determined that it should not so become. Americans were not to become involved.

Clapp sailed to Cuba (not Jamaica), where he painted swampy waterways overhung with palms, sometimes in soft diffused mists, sometimes with sharp, short piercing glazes that turned paintings into vibrating jewels.

After two years of this Clapp moved to California. America (and its protectorate, Cuba) had been drawn into the war. One wonders why Clapp chose California. Painting reputations were made (if you overlooked that even in wartime Paris was undisputed art capital of the world) in New York. But Clapp had tasted Gotham and found it lacking. In those days, even more than now, almost anyone who ever tasted California found himself thereafter suffering a malady that only return West could cure. Clapp never set foot in the East again.

The San Francisco Bay Area already had tried a generous taste of contemporary European and American art (along with a belly of schmaltz) at the grandiose 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Many of the same artists who so severely shook the teeth out of the set jaws of the Eastern establishment in the New York Armory Show in 1913 had been represented.

Until then most California painters had basked under the influence of American Tonalists, represented by James McNeill Whistler, George Inness, Ralph Albert Blakelock. Charles Caffin, writing in 1902, defined this esthetic as "the prevalence of some one colour in a picture to which all other hues are subordinated." A second aspect, he said, "involved the setting of all objects, lights, and colours, in a picture in due relationship to one another within an enveloppe of atmosphere." Not until 1915 and a myriad of museum and gallery shows that tumbled quickly on the heels of the Pan-Pacific did California painters digest the impact of Impressionism.

When Clapp landed in Oakland in 1917 he carried good credentials. He had already digested and adapted Impressionism and Post-impressionism. Probably he understood them better than anyone else on the West Coast. Oakland was not a bad place for him to light. The community was alive to new things, and he found ready employment as an instructor of life drawing at the California School of Arts and Crafts.

One of the throwoffs of the Pan-Pacific was Robert B. Harshe, its assistant director of fine arts. On February 1, 1916 he became the first director of the Oakland Art Gallery, which had been opened under the sponsorship of the Oakland Art Association, whose president was Dr. William S. Porter, a collector. Clapp had hardly got his feet set before the Gallery offered him a show. The Oakland Tribune, November 18, 1917, carried the following review:

CLAPP EXHIBITION IN OAKLAND GALLERY

> The Oakland Gallery is showing an exhibition of William Henry Clapp, remotely a Montreal man, who after a student period in Paris of some years, has established himself in Oakland.
>
> Here are several interesting canvases, among them "Canadian Autumn," a simple statement of the russet harvest time in the northern country, where, the artist informs me, the sun sets vermilion in the days that preface the white winter. I am accepting the explanation--Mr, Clapp bears a most honest countenance--to account for the color in the strong canvas, "In Shallow Water," that hangs on the south wall. It is a stunning color combination, a bit at variance, however, with conventional conceptions of sunset habits.
>
> But if that is the way Mr. Clapp saw it, far be it from me to wish him to mollify it. Let us have, above all things, the truth. The hoary old world is weary of the fullfillment of the expected, to fit into preconceived perceptions.
>
> A subtle bit of painting--quite at variance with the sunset treatments--is "The Rainstorm," a group of figures slipping by in the gray, misty vapor of a warm rain. There is a substance to the figures so slightly lined.
>
> Mr. Clapp is an avowed disciple of the "plein air" men, getting his air vibrations by means of broken color, in some instances more happily than others--a fault of his virtues, probably!
>
> Mr. Clapp has exhibited in the Paris salons, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Carnegie Institue, and in all the Canadian exhibitions for many years.
>
> That Canada lies near to his heart, a few minutes' conversation develops. And thus he paints her, with faith in the truth of his vision. (18 Nov. 1917)

A few weeks later the San Francisc Art Association asked Clapp to provide one painting to a select exhibition of California art to be installed in two galleries of the Palace of Fine Arts, which had been erected by the Pan-Pacific. The collection would change every four months. It was to be "an index to the best achieved in California Art."

Robert B. Harshe gave way to Worth Ryder as the curator of the Oakland Art Gallery, and when Ryder took off for a mountain rendezvous, 1918, Clapp was asked to take his place temporarily. A bit later Laura Bride Powers, writing in the Sunday Tribune reported,

> For six months William H. Clapp has been director of the Oakland Art Gallery. He came to us quite as a stranger from up Canada way, after a stay of some profitable years in Europe, bringing with him some neo-impressionistic things that revealed him a practicioner of art to be reckoned with. And he was invited to give an exhibition. Then we grew to know the modest fellow for what he was--an artist of uncompromising idealism and an indomitable will for work...he has done for Oakland the impossible--given to it a fresh show every two weeks, and a show in which verve and spontaneity illuminated the gray walls in a way that those-who-care should hold in memory. And it has been a service of love, for duing the long dull says of summer when everybody and his wife were off in the woods or down by the shore, he was scouting about for good things for your delectation and mine--and the amazing part is that he got them.
>
> In all the exhibitions--sketches mostly--there has been a conspicuous absence of an unworthy thing and a happy preponderance of good things, better concepts in many instances than the finished productions that will appear in formal shows--more spirit and more direction of purpose...
>
> It is no small service to the younger artists--and indeed to the older and "arrived" painters as well--that Mr. Clapp has rendered during his stewardship in providing so many of them an audience. And...in providing them with buyers for real money.

From another group show about this time in Oakland a critic singled out Clapp's A Sunlit Road---

> ...stands out distinctly from the more gaudy brilliant pictures about it. The observer immediately feels that here is

> optimism, happiness, love of nature, and the joy of living clearly expressed. The color combinations of blue, yellow, and red are especially effective. Clapp's work is decidedly individual. His productions are easily picked out from the others. There is a dainty airiness expressive of the beauties of nature in all his work which is unmistakable.

In July, 1919, Clapp's fame was spreading northward, Two Clapp paintings were among 42 California works exhibited by the Seattle Fine Arts Society, and both were singled out by The Sunday Times critic:

> "Vibration" as a mode of art, finds a considerable justification in "The New Church," one of two works from the brush of William H. Clapp. Viewed from the opposite end of the gallery the multitudinous array of irregular short dashes of greens, blues, reds and yellows by which it suggests rather than depicts its subject, invite the eye with an effect not unlike the shimmer of sunlight when heat rays create definite impressions on the eyes. It is one of the four or five paintings attracting the most attention.
>
> Another painting by this artist, "A Cuban Ford," is perhaps the most difficult subject in the exposition. The actual drawing of the horse in midstream is very good. The work is something in the same manner of "The New Church," but is more frank.

Clapp's three-year temporary duty as gallery chief became a permanent post in 1921, when Dr. Porter decided to give his art collection to the gallery. Sometimes Clapp was called the curator; sometimes the director. The terms were interchangeable. He remained until he retired in 1952, after 34 years of remarkable service. In 1918 the pay was not much. Laura Powers made sure her readers appreciated the situation: "Let it also be of record that Clapp, like his predecessors, and those who come after, give of their time and talent for the acute and dominating love they bear for art--their pay is a quarter of that given the janitor." (Italics added.) No wonder, then, that Clapp opened an art school under his own name in Douglas Tilden's studio and ran it until 1926. The original announcement for his classes read, "Painting and Drawing

Classes, Evening Night Classes, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., W. H. Clapp ARCA Instructor, 387 Twelfth Street, corner of Franklin, Oakland, California."

About this time (1919) a dynamic 20-year-old Oakland beauty, Mrs. Florence Wieben Lehre, joined the gallery staff. The combination of William Henry Clapp and Florence Lehre was like thunder and electricity. As Clapp later described the situation, "At that time the gallery had practically no income, no equipment, and no visitors." Florence Lehre's job was to remedy all that by whipping up public excitement. She constantly ridiculed art snobbery, but she wrote with so much breeze and tolerance that she struck a new note in art criticism thereabouts. She quickly became assistant director of the museum and eventually Pacific editor of The Art Digest, established in New York City in 1928, and art editor of the daily Oakland Tribune. She became more. She became Clapp's model and inseparable girlfriend.

Carved out of an unbeckoning upstairs corner of the Oakland Municipal Auditorium, the museum had an average attendance of less than one visitor a day. Mrs. Lehre later wrote, "For ten years Mr. Clapp and I gladly worked as janitors, laborers, picture hangers--anything to make the gallery a success." It took 10 years for them to get the total annual budget up to $6,495. This included pay for a new permanent handyman.

The Society of Six

In the spring of 1917, shortly after Clapp arrived from Cuba, more than 30 painters, sculptors, and art students formalized an artists' club of the East Bay. Clapp and Selden Gile were among them. "Will Bohemia rise in Oakland?" the Tribune wondered, calling attention to the paintable surrounding hills and the waterfront. From this quickly evolved "The Six "--Clapp, Gile, August Gay, Maurice Logan, Louis Siegriest, and Bernard Von Eichman.

Siegriest is still alive and remembers the evening when their exclusive membership was formalized. "I was damn pleased to be included."

Laura Bride Powers wrote in the Tribune (15 April 1923):

> ...the Six are comrades who work and play together. With them the terms are synonymous--these singing six who venture forth on Sundays where the mood lures them, bringing back the product of the day to the "Chow House" for supper and razzing. The "Chow House," you know, is the vine-covered cottage on Chabot Road where Selden Gile has set up his prismatic glasses--a world of color, emotionally vibrant to the alchemy of sunlight.

The Six made painting expeditions to all areas neighboring the Bay, along the coast from Mendocino on the North (the new artists' colony of the 1960's) to Carmel on the South (the old artists' colony), eastward into the Mother Lode country, and to Taos, New Mexico.

For a decade Gile's cabin served The Six as tribal hall. Although it had electricity, it lacked toilet and bath, inconveniences that in no way dampened the gutsy fauve rituals they went through nearly every week-end. Clapp would arrive at the meeting with a loud "Ho-Ho-Ho." One

imagines it a little forced. Von Eichman might show up with a jug of prune whiskey. He called it San Jose Cheer. If not, Gile offered bootleg red wine or a devastating home-brewed beer to wash down his garlic-shrapnelled meals.

In a 1954 taped interview Siegriest recalled:

> Gile was a marvelous cook--he would not let anyone help him or even buy or bring anything for the Saturday or Sunday night dinners. He put garlic on everything. He used to have big steaks with garlic chopped over it. Always baked potatoes with oil, garlic salt and pepper mixture which you would pour over the baked potatoes--a large garlic and olive oil salad--and many kinds of vegetables. The only dessert he ever would have around the place was the fresh fruit of many kinds and cheese and the blackest coffee you ever saw. He always had gallons of wine--red wine--he had an Italian who brought two gallons a week to him.
>
> --Louis Bassi Siegriest Reminiscences, University of California Regional Oral History office.

Among the Six Gile was the driver, the dominator, a creature split on the one side by a misanthropy that blackballed the gifted William Gaw from membership in the group, and on the other by a sensitive generosity that kept alive both the artistic will and the body of the younger, impoverished August Gay.

Von Eichman, too, carried schizophrenic shadows. St. John reports he drove "a hopped-up Ford with a Ruckstell axle that featured chariot-like protrusions which were used to clip off other cars' hubcaps." The battles between him and Gile often leaped the bounds of oral debate. Von Eichman (he also used the names Hickman, Eichman and Van Eichman) was a merchant seaman, an oiler. His sensors counted the pulse of the artworld abroad. He would frequent museums of major ports, buy their latest books to placate his omnivorous hunger to read, and steam back to the Chow House with armloads of art magazines for The Six to wolf down with

their bootlegged beer and whiskey. He became marooned on a boat in the Yangtze River in 1921 when his ship's company went bankrupt. Stranded for two years, he lived in Chinese jails and poorhouses. He was sprung just in time to participate in The Six's first group show in the Oakland Art Gallery.

This was the first of half a dozen annual exhibits held by The Six. It was at this time, according to Florence Lehre, that they were dubbed The Society of Six in a Tribune review by Jennie Vennerstron Cannon, who "elected herself godmother to the clan." (Cited by St. John)

Mary McPhail, also in the Tribune, wrote, "A new school of art is in the process of formulation here and a group of local artists known as the Society of Six has thrown down the gauntlet to the world in general and to San Francisco in particular." She quoted Clapp, "Across the bay they seem to us to lack joy of vision and color--here vision and color are the very foundation of art." It was a key remark, an indication of his theory of Visualism he spent his life developing.

Against Gile and Von Eichman, Clapp was a calm surrounded by hurricane. Siegriest said (1972) "Clapp was a very quiet sort of fellow. A real gentleman, polite and quiet...the way these guys talked in front of him... he looked embarrassed but would join in."

Clapp's participation in the Salon d'Automne, Paris, 1906, came on only the fourth manifestation of that storm-born body. Organized by avant-garde artists whose names are now sanctified, its inaugural show had been bloodily garroted by a conspiracy of petty functionaries and politically influential artists living in the bygone. Only the marshalling of public opinion and bureaucratic infighting by a few who cared enabled the Salon to set up, finally, in substitute quarters. This spirit of revolution and declaration was still endemic in Paris and was made all the

sweeter because the Salon had won its battles. So in Paris Clapp had become conditioned to the usefulness of manifestos and the value of artists drawing together to defend themselves to the public like an advancing phalanx. Accordingly, they issued a manifesto at the opening of the first exhibit of the Society of Six. Clapp was the manifesto's Thomas Jefferson.

"WE BELIEVE"

All great art is founded upon the use of visual abstractions to express beauty.

These abstractions are: vision, light, color, space (third dimensional form), atmosphere (air), vibration (life, movement), form (length and breadth) and form of accidents such as persons, trees, etc.

Pattern is the means by which the abstractions are arranged and united in such a way as to procure the esthetic end. And by pattern we mean unity, contrast, harmony, variety, symmetry, rhythm, radiation, interchange, line, tone, etc.

Form, i.e. objects, is accidental and transitory, except in its large sense--space. That the object we see happens to be a man instead of a tree or other object is an accident, since if we look a few feet to one side we see an entirely different object. Form is also destroyed and distorted by light, color, vision, and space--in other words, its visual existence is by grace of larger abstractions. We choose the greater rather than the lesser, inasmuch as painting is interpretation rather than representation, and it is only by sacrifice of the lesser that we can express the greater with most force.

To us, seeing is the greatest joy of existence, and we try to express that joy. Hence, the cheer and happiness of the present exhibition.

We do not believe that painting is a language. Nor do we try to "say" things, but we do try to fix upon canvas the joy of vision. To express, to show--not to write hieroglyphics. We have no concern with stories, with lapse of time, nor with the probability of improbability or hereafter. In other words, we are not trying to illustrate a thought or write a catalogue, but to produce a joy through the use of the eyes. We have much to express, but nothing to say. We have felt, and desire that others may also feel.

Obviously, Clapp was the theoretician. He was always writing down his impressions. He was the only one of the six who had formal European art training, and he was forever philosophizing for them. Someone had to tell them what they were doing. His cosmologizing was barely tolerated by the others, but it was the inevitable malady of anyone who had been bitten so sharply by the scientific methodism of a Seurat. Consider, too, that as a responsible museum curator he had to be able to interpret in words--for the public, for the press, for his trustees--what artists were about. Clapp wrote for other reasons, too. Gile and Von Eichman, and probably the others, could take out their frustrations in a grandiose drunk (Gile died of acute alcoholism), but the private gloom of Clapp's occasional pessimism, which he never betrayed through his brush, had to burst free through his pen.

There were six successive annual exhibitions of the Society of Six in the Oakland Art Gallery, The last fell in March, 1928.

Since 1919 Gay, who had been brought from France to California at the age of 9, had been living in Monterey. This necessitated 250-mile roundtrips on those occasions when he wanted to reach Gile's Chow House. He supported himself working in the fish canneries and then as a wood-carver, which increasingly took his time. His need for the Six lessened as he became associated with Carmel-Monterey art groups and galleries. Gile moved from Oakland in 1927 to a houseboat at Belvedere, a community on a Bay peninsula north of the Golden Gate. What savings and hope he had were wiped out by the Great Depression. The Los Angeles Museum sent Logan to Africa in 1925 to make color studies for animal diorama backdrops; he went from Africa to Europe to copy paintings in museums and then built a substantial California career as a commercial artist. Siegriest, too was in and out of the weekly convocations. He went to Seattle in 1921 to paint outdoor advertising posters for 2½ years. After a brief return to

Oakland he worked for ad agencies in Dallas, Chicago, and Milwaukee, returning to work for the San Francisco Chronicle in 1931. About then the stormy Von Eichman moved to New York and found a job as a window decorator for Macy's and gradually gave up painting.

Although their fruitful dozen years (1917-28) were past, the Society of Six continued together in fragments--a few letters, occasional social clannings (made more sociable and less art-productive by Giles's increasing alcoholism)--until 1941. The Six were seldom imitators of each other, and eventually, as all tight art societies composed of people with genuine talent, the group disintegrated and members went separate ways. The Depression made five of them more darkly pessimistic. Von Eichman, for example, painted Harlem social commentary before he let his brushes harden in their pots. Not so, Clapp. He "continued to pursue his gentle Impressionistic vision."

A re-collection of the Society of Six opened in the Oakland Museum in October, 1972. In the first paragraph to his brilliantly concise, exceptionally documented catalog, Associate Curator Terry St. John says:

> The Six based their creative life on avoiding the "gorgeous pot boilers" (Giles derision in a letter to Siegriest, 1927) that found greater acceptance and recognition then, just as they do today. All members of The Six...discovered for themselves during their long association what it was like to be an artist and a member of a close-knit, self-conscious art movement. They all had strong and independent personalities that helped them to avoid the studied and artificial attitudes previously adopted by past generations of Europeanized California artists. The Society of Six was intensely devoted to its self-imposed, rough-and-tumble ideas. The members sensed they were not making art merely for the sake of newness, but with an exhilaration that was born from overthrowing subservient attitudes towards previously sanctified art works.

St. John concludes, "Successive years and time's momentum have not buried 'The Six' because their basic integrity and abilities are authentically rooted in the mainstream of California art. Their work

continues to surface because of its inherent validity and the archetypal beauty of their images."

In the Museum

With an abysmal average attendance in the Gallery of one visitor per day, the need for Florence Lehre's publicity was obvious. Clapp and Lehre set out to shake the public.

By outdoing older, richer museums across the Bay; by bringing in shattering, pace-leaping European works; by plunging into local and regional art controversy; by being fearless but fair; and by just plain hokum they succeeded. They succeeded so well that by the time the Fifth Annual (not to be confused with the Society of Six Annuals) rolled around in 1927 they had the press pumping for a new $700,000 art museum.

Jehanne Bierty Salinger Carlson, who was founding editor of The Argus in 1927, and then art editor of Heart's San Francisco Examiner after The Argus was merged with The Art Digest in 1929, declared in a 1972 interview that Clapp made Oakland "the most advanced art gallery in the Bay Area."

Looking back from today's vantage point, the Gallery's first monumental coup was the Blue Four exhibit of 1926. It was brought about by the collaboration of Clapp and Frau Galka Scheyer. One can easily visualize Clapp, Lehre, and maybe Scheyer puffing, shuffling, and climbing up and down ladders to hang the precious pictures all by themselves.

Scheyer was herself an Impressionist painter, a German. Authorities allowed her to enter Switzerland during World War I to do portraits of some children. She stayed. After living blankly in the same house

with Klee and Kandinsky for two years the import of their work finally hit her. In 1924 she assembled a Blue Four collection of Jawlensky, Feininger, Klee, and Kandinsky and came to America with high expectations of capturing the New World. She succeeded in getting a show only at the commercial, insignificant Daniel Gallery in New York. Perhaps she became discouraged. She moved to San Francisco in 1925 and was drawn to the Oakland Art Gallery and its two-person staff. Clapp wangled her an official appointment as European Representative of the Oakland Art Gallery the next year, and thus in Oakland The Blue Four were given their first American museum exhibition. Under Oakland aegis, the show, with Scheyer as traveling lecturer, then circulated to museums and galleries throughout the West. A second collection was shown in 1931. This traveled to Mexico City that year and as far eastward as Chicago... and finally hit the avant-garde village of New York City, the Bucholz Galleries--in 1944!

Clapp said, "The Blue Four Exhibition is one of the most significant collections of abstract art ever put before the American public."

The Blue Four were appreciative. Kandinsky wrote a personal note to Clapp (9 Dec. 1926): "It is such a great pleasure to know that there is a possibility to reach out my hand over half the globe to someone who thinks the same way."

Clapp gave Jawlensky his first one-man show in America in 1928; Kandinsky got one in 1929, the same year Feininger was given a show of block prints; and Klee's one-man came in 1935. Clapp saw to it that these shows were exposed in other cities. In 1937 he wrote to the director of the museum in Stockton, "I am sorry that the Jawlensky show shocked your public, but that was to be expected."

Clapp wanted people to understand The Blue Four Exhibition. He wrote his own newspaper review, which carried his byline, under the headlines:

PAINTINGS SHOWN
BY ULTRAMODERN
CREATING STIR

Initiates Hail Exhibition of
Work by "Blue Four" as
Laymen Gasp in Wonder

"Absurd!" "Outrages upon common sense." "Wild monstrosities that must have emanated from a madhouse." Such is the verdict of the casual visitor, the so-called man in the street when viewing the exhibition of "The Blue Four" in the Oakland Municipal Art Gallery. And yet, from the other side:

"Strange, uncanny, weirdly masterful!" "Powerful works of art that reach the heights of ultramodernism!" This is from artists and connoisseurs the world over regarding the same pictures, the same men.

Who is right? In which class do you find yourself? Or haven't you troubled to find yourself?

In reality the work of "The Blue Four"--Kandinsky, Feininger, Jawlensky, and Paul Klee--is one of those art collections that are as touchstones by which we may judge the mentality of the observer. Too often the reaction is: "I do not understand it; therefore it is bad." A better attitude would be: "I do not understand it; therefore it is probably good."

Man Conservative

Man is a conservative creature and he resents new things or expressions of a personality different from his own. He likes the art parrot who repeats the views of the observer rather than his own (the artist's). In persons of this type the work of the Four can produce only a hearty laugh or emphatic resentment--an echo from his own mind.

There are two ways to look at a picture. The way of the average person who has no real interestin art because art has never been brought to him as have the more common-place things of life; and that of the artist or connoisseur who, through tolerance, has learned to enjoy with great intensity the many phases of art, regardless of his own personal preferences.

The layman admires the photographic--a faithful copy of nature--a product of tools and rules--not a product of emotion. "No inspiration, hence no creation." The initiate insist that a picture must not be photographic--for obvious reasons.

Renowned Masters

"The Blue Four" are internationally renowned masters whose work has been discussed in numberless works of art, and is to be seen in art museums and private collections throughout the world, notably Munich, Vienna, Tokyo, Stockholm, Chicago, New York, Copenhagen, Dresden, Amsterdam, Berlin, London, etc. If even this imposing list is not enough to convince the public, they may read of these famous men in the works of Arthur Jerome Eddy, Katherine S. Dreier, Clive Bell, Sheldon Cheney, Kandinsky, Huntington Wright, and, if they happen to be linguists, Wolfradt, Hoelderlin, Grohmann, and countless other foreign critics.

An interesting fact is that a whole gallery in the Kronprinzen Palais Museum, Berlin, is devoted to a permanent collection of Paul Klee's work, which was purchased by the government. The other men have also been the recipients of distinguished honors. A human touch is lent to the career of Feininger, the American, when one learns that on his resignation from professorship at the State Guild (Bauhaus) in Weimar last year, he was so highly esteemed that the government erected a home and studio for him and his family on the campus, just to keep his name attached to the institution.

A curious summary of the strangeness and originality of the exhibition lies in the fact that Kandinsky has succeeded in producing pictures so abstract that they have no subject!

Visitors to the gallery in the auditorium during the present month will be shocked and outraged, or receptive and delighted--as they will.

It is a curious polemic. Except at the very end, when Clapp says the Kandinskys are so abstract that they have no subjects, he does not try to explain the exhibit. Instead he scolds the public. Although he talks about two categories of gallery visitor, those who will understand and those who won't, he is prepared for the worst. Most will NOT understand. And so Clapp goes to great length to underscore that these painters are artists of substance and merit more than ignorant putdown from the public.

How far reaching were the effects? In 1961, Professor (of Design) Mary Dumas of the University of California, wrote Paul Mills, then director of the Oakland Art Gallery:

> I am sure you have seen the Paul Klee exhibit on the campus by now. When I saw it the other day I thought of when I first saw several beautiful exhibitions of Klee, Feininger, Kandinsky, et al. And that was the Oakland Art Gallery... the wonderful period in the mid-Thirties when Mr. Clapp brought many wonderful shows to the Oakland Museum. I was a student at the time and, of course, people such as Ryder, Peterson, Haley were talking about the moderns and there were very few exhibitions anyplace. (This was before the S. F. Museum.) Once in awhile Vanity Fair or Vogue would have a reproduction. There was absolutely nothing to see anyplace. Clapp was a voice crying in the wilderness. I am sure he was severely critized for having these shows. Dungan of the Tribune was particularly blasting. I can remember being almost the sole if not the only person walking through the gallery halls. And I remember the pleasure I got from the Klees et al. I think they were the same ones now on the campus. The contrast and irony of fate struck me...I do feel it would be just and fair if someday people such as Clapp would be given their due for laying the foundation for the interest in art today. He was definitely a voice crying in the wilderness.

Clapp viewed his position as head of the museum as a public trust. In a tax-supported institution, he felt, all artistic expressions have the right to be heard. A look at the names of artists who got their first American museum recognition in Oakland attests to his taste and determination to make the museum a showplace for the newest and best. To the roster of Jawlensky, Feininger, Klee and Kandinsky, already mentioned, add Kirchner, Nolde, Hofer, Heckel, Rotluff, Pechstein, Kokoschka, Archipengo, Raoul Dufy, Rockwell Kent, Arthur Davies, Hartley, Signac, Tamayo, Vlaminck, MacDonald-Wright, Gauguin, Picasso to those he showed during the first 12 to 14 years of his stewardship.

Sametime, the gallery gave local artists opportunity. The Oakland Annual was begun in 1923. Clapp was unhappy with the usual form of jurying, as he had seen it in Canada, in the Paris salons, in the Carnegie, and everywhere else. Shows are manifestations of tastes and prejudices

and compromises of jurymen. A better, less prejudiced way had to be found. Clapp was always trying new ways. For the First Annual he invented a three-jury system which brought notoriety in the Eastern art press and moans from other museums of why didn't we think of that.

A conservative jury would select from conservative art entered. A progressive jury would select from the progressive entries. And a radical jury would winnow the radical paintings and sculpture. Thus each category of entrants would be judged by a strata of sympathetic, knowledgeable peers.

A retorting letter to the editor of the Tribune reflects how far Clapp had brought public interest:

> Artists in all ages have been a mirror of the times in which they live...We Americans are passing through the jazz era with its high industrial development, telephones, telegraphs, radios, transit cars, trains, etc...Giotto and Raphael mirrored their times--the chapels and madonnas...The artists did not create our era--they only reflect it...In the present annual are works from the entire section west of the Rockies. The inventions of the jazz age, plus a fair, impartial gallery director, William H. Clapp, are responsible for the large territorial showing. No city in California is able to bring together works of so remotely scattered cities. Mr. Clapp has built slowly, cautiously, wounding and offending as little as possible. San Francisco turns down all work from Southern California. Los Angeles turns down most from the North. Mr. Clapp says, "Come one, come all. We, the City of Oakland, will try to treat you fairly!" Hence, the very interesting work now on view. The broad facts to him who knows the art of the west draws the public far more than the few nudes--placed conspicuously on the most conspicuous wall.
>
> If the Oakland public should copy Phoenix people and really BUY some of these pictures...I cannot predict what would happen. I believe the $700 ,000 art gallery planned would soon be realized and William H. Clapp could then give an annual that would rival the National Academy showing in New York, and Oakland would then be the proudest city in California. Let every Eastbay person wake up and know what is at his door.

What was at the Eastbay door? Nudes? Nudes did the letter writer say! Indeed. And if the 1926 Blue Four failed to put the Oakland Art

Gallery on the map, two nude paintings put it on every front page in America whose editor dared scandalize his readers by the mere printing of the word nude.

It all started with the Fifth Annual Exhibition, which was held in February, 1927, when the hills around the Bay shimmer their greenest.

In order to keep jurymen from unduly influencing each other's votes, Clapp this year put into use an electrical voting machine he had invented in 1921. Each juryman had a button which would light up a red bulb on a tally machine. All would vote at the same time, and there was no way to tell who had ignited the red lights. With many pictures to judge, the machine was much faster than secret written ballots. Clapp wryly referred to the device as a weapon in "the war to make art safe for domesticity."

The ultramodern jury, consisting of Galka Scheyer, Ray Boynton (an instructor at the University of California), Von Eichman and a painter named Gottardo Piazzoni had selected the radical paintings, including works by Von Eichman and Boynton themselves, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, and others. The conservative jury consisted of Gile, Gaw, Logan, and Phillips Lewis.

Clapp, courageous but not foolhardy and ever sensitive to the nuances of his position--the Gallery was a tax-supported institution governed by the Library Board--had gently warned his juries that they were to act as moral censors as well as judges of artistic merit. /Unpublished letter to Pros. Eugen Neuhaus, 7 Feb. 1927/. Although they rejected two paintings on moral grounds, the radical jury hung two nudes, Woman by Forrest L. Brissey and Nude No. 1 by Edward Hagedorn. According to the Oakland Tribune (Feb. 7) the conservative jury concurred in the choice.

One wonders now just how many minutes passed after the opening of the doors on Sunday, February 6 before someone ran searching irately for Clapp. The day's visitors included a band of Oakland clubwomen.

Seeing a tempest beginning, half an hour before closing time Clapp, and presumably Florence Lehre, decided to place questionnaires in the gallery, headed, "This Gallery Invites Your Comments." Clapp quoted that first day's returns in a letter to Professor Neuhaus of the U. C. art department:

"In favor of letting the poor things be--but suggest placing milk and eggs conveniently at night for Hagedorn's lady, so that she could receive a little much-needed nourishment."

"Such things as those two nudes belong in such a place as the old time bar room--not for youthful edification."

"If those nudes are beautiful, give me the long clothes of olden days." (signed)

"Let 'em hang, but put a curtain at the waistline." (signed)

"I am embarrassed for those men and women who can see smut in art." (signed)

"We feel that our clubwomen represent the better thought of things in general, and we are quite in sympathy with their attitude." (signed)

"Given to artists is the gift of inspiration. If the artists felt inspired to paint the nudes in question, I feel they should be retained and studied if we cannot now understand." (signed)

"All pictures in first and third rooms very good. Room 2 is a disgrace to art. The Sunday funny paper is the place for cartoons."

"Pictures in room 2 are far from being '<u>Art</u>.' Disgusting."

"Nudes by Edward Hagedorn and Brissey have no place in our exhibit. This is not true art."

The Monday morning papers erupted with reports that Oakland clubwomen were in arms over the Brissey and Hagedorn nudes. Twenty-five of the most irate had signed a petition demanding removal of the two paintings.

The attackers also singled out Clapp. Of course. He was accused of vulgar sensationalism by the chairman of the fine arts division of the California Federation of Womens Clubs. She suggested he charge 25¢ admission. Perhaps as the show set new attendance records Clapp began wishing he had.

Ironically sandwiched between Brissey's and Hagedorn's distorted nudes was a third painting depicting "an innocuous group of female figures." Although erotically it was the most explicit of the three, its fitness for public display was not challenged.

In the tabulations, 79 percent of the visitors voted to keep the two paintings in the show.

Clapp gathered supporting statements from three art experts and then added a pithy note of his own.

Worth Ryder (former director of Oakland Art Gallery): "If these pictures have merit as works of art, that is sufficient. If nude paintings cannot be hung in art galleries, crucifixions should not be hung in churches..."

E. Spencer Macky (dean of faculty, California School of Fine Arts): "I think that this action on the part of the clubwomen shows rank hypocrisy. I'll wager that many of the women who signed the petition wear short skirts and have bobbed their hair. Ten years ago they would have been shocked at these things..."

Ray Boynton (on jury--modernist and instructor at tho University of California): "Ninety-nine percent of the immorality in a painting is put there by the spectator..."

W. H. Clapp: "This episode is a manifestation of the almost universal desire to suppress that which we do not understand...Apart from their merits as works of art these pictures merely say that ugly women should not remove their clothing."

The San Francisco Argonaut maliciously hinted that the clubwomen of Oakland had kicked up the fuss out of envy. The Art Digest (New York) reported that the ladies filled the newspapers with so much protest that "all the prurient minded of the community flocked to the gallery." Indeed, on February 9 a one-day attendance record of 1500 was set.

The most incisive, delectable reaction came from Brissey himself. Clapp was in no mood to yield to the women, but Brissey insisted on removing his painting. Brissey declared:

> I fully understand that my action is unethical, but the action of the women's clubs in requesting the removal of the nudes has created a public attention toward my picture which is extremely immoral. The public is not interested in the work as art, but because of the thoughtless actions of members of women's clubs. On several occasions, I have, unknown to anyone, watched the public in the galleries, and find this to be their attitude toward the exhibit. This places my nude in a very immoral atmosphere, and is responsible for my desire to remove it."

His statement was hung in the picture's place.

The Argonaut agreed with Brissey and wrote an editorial that echos right out of the 1960's.

> There is little question that the flood of pornography that in the last few years has inundated the nation is a result of the long puritanic repression under which the United States has groaned. The groans of the puritan, who identifies the beautiful with the damned, for many years have been, in fact, the battle slogans of the forces of censorship in America... If the American people had that fineness of taste that only art can give, and that understanding of life that only the free spirit of intellectual curiosity can convey, they would not have so strong a yearning for the pornographic.

The incident was a forerunner to a bigger brouhaha the next year. In the meantime it offered Clapp and his friends a good deal of private

horseplay. They sent ribald cartoons to each other and engaged in a lot of off-scene nonsense.

The reaction of the Oakland clubwomen was not a unique East Bay phenomenon. About this time the Women's Club of San Francisco was completing a new building. A commission had been given to Mrs. Katherine Gillespie, a craftsman and originator of a plaster decorative panel technique that required no firing. Its charm lay in the wonderful quality of her color, which for the most part was rich but low in tone--ochres, blues, terra cotta reds with touches of green and brown. When her room was completed "the effect was wonderful and mysterious." Some people thought it might be based upon Michelangelo's Sistine nudes. That was lofty praise. But certain lay members objected, and the beautiful polychrome was blanked with a thick coat of veiling silver. Art Digest wondered if a more enlightened generation someday would restore this work of art.

Nor was puritanical reaction to such things an American phenomenon. At the same time as the Oakland show a Nude Figure Couché appeared in Paris on the cover of Le Crapouillet and was promptly seized by police.

Some time later Art Digest had a tip to California women's clubs intent on exorcizing nude pictures. It reported a review in the Tribune of Joseph Cumming Chase's Romance of an Art Career, by Mathilde Kindsley, who said:

> Regarding pictures of girls in the nude, Chase has a rather interesting philosophy. There are two kinds...modest and immodest. The modest, chaste nudes are those whose eyes do not meet the eyes of the person looking at the picture. The brazen, immodest ones are those in which the eyes of the model look directly into the eyes of the observer, as if she were well aware of being observed and liked it.

Retorted Art Digest: California artists should make their nude's adjustable to the idiosyncracies of observers by making them shifty-eyed.

The Oakland Art War

The Oakland Art War lay lurking only eleven months away. The Brissey-Hagedorn skirmish was to what followed as the sinking of the Panay was to Pearl Harbor.

The 1927 skirmish had been a Tombstone standoff. Clapp had not permitted the removal of Hagedorn's Nude No.1, but Brissey's Woman had been forced out. The Oakland women had sipped blood.

Perhaps no analysis serves better to show the spirit of the Bay Area at the time than a column which Arthur Millier, the perceptive art critic for the Los Angeles Times, wrote for his paper after a trip north. It was quoted in its entirety by Art Digest (1 Feb. 1928), which called San Francisco the most modernist of any community in the United States, not excepting either Chicago or New York, and Los Angeles among the conservative. Millier wrote:

> The visitor to San Francisco who devotes even a short time to visiting art galleries and studios quickly discovers what Maynard Dixon called the "orthodoxy of modernism." Of dealers' galleries in the Los Angeles sense he will not find many, but he will encounter a very different type of art gallery operated cooperatively by artists or by people genuinely interested in art and displaying works predominantly "modern" in tendency.
>
> At the California School of Fine Arts he will see students encouraged to work in a "modern" way, which means for the most part that they render still-life and figures in a series of colored planes bearing some similarity to those used by Cezanne when he wished to paint an apple, a face or a landscape.
>
> The art world of San Francisco, in a word, is aggressively "modern," and while the younger generation is delighted with this aesthetic phenomenon, there are among the dealers,

connoisseurs and artists those who feel that San Francisco has jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. They question the validity of the current worship tendered to planes, organization, significant form and all those mysteries that loom so large in the vocabulary of contemporary art criticism.

One result, say some dealers, is that pictures can no longer be sold in the city. The public, they say, will not buy so-called conservative paintings because they have been told that they are not art, but neither will they buy "modern" works because they do not like them. A loan exhibition of paintings and drawings by Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist, gathered from many private owners in the Bay District and shown at the East West Galleries, would seem to question this contention.

For my own part I find the art atmosphere of San Francisco healthy and stimulating. The raw efforts of youth trying so hard to be "modern" at all costs have at least the virtue of being amusing, and the genuine interest of the artists and their friends has brought to the city really important exhibitions of vital contemporary art. In addition there is a sound body of good work being produced by artists in the north, work that keeps abreast of present-day art conceptions the world over.

One is spared, in the San Francisco of today, those interminable showings of dull paintings that confront the reviewer daily in Los Angeles. In the paintings and sculpture produced there one feels that the artists have passed that stage where they are principally concerned with the stimulation of light or the imitation of natural facts and are, in a body, trying hard to use the forms and colors of nature to express their experiences rather than to illustrate scenes or events. This leads to grotesqueries that astonish the innocent public but it also leads to genuine works of art.

On the whole, however, the San Francisco public does not give a whoop what the artists do, whether they are modern or conservative. A few people who enjoy art and artists patronize with money and enthusiasm, but the northern public compared to our own is very unsentimental. That sentiment for "the higher and finer things of life" that in Los Angeles embraces prophet and charlatan indiscriminately, organizes clubs and cults, holds meetings, publishes pamphlets, and longs to "do something for art" is foreign to the northern public. Whether this is gain or loss is hard to determine. Certainly public indifference has steeled the artist to work out his problems with little thought of remuneration.

But, it is claimed with some justice, the cult of the modern has left the public high and dry. The habit of buying pictures has gone out of fashion. When someone in Los Angeles tells

> me they have a picture the bets are more than even that it is a bad picture, but at least they have bought a picture and thus supported the theory that artists must live. Yet on the other hand, they have helped blind themselves still further to the nature of true art.
>
> San Francisco's alleged indifference to art may be very hard on artists, she may fail to support as large a body of art workers as Los Angeles, yet if I were asked to name the three foremost painters and the two foremost sculptors of California today, they would, in my humble opinion, all be found living in the northern city.

Just after New Year's, 1928, the Oakland Art Gallery opened its doors to a circulating exhibition of "Thirty European Modernists." What names they were! Among them Feininger, Gauguin, Kirchner, Kandinsky, Picasso, and Nolde. An avant-garde show of major proportions. Today any museum would fall over its heels rushing to book it. But...there were nudes in it. And to the stiff Victorian women of East Bay, the nudes were all the more disgusting because they were distorted and grotesque.

Clapp's museum was controlled by the Library Board. Coming on like an infuriated, doublecrossed Carrie Nation, a woman appeared before the board to bewail the exhibit. Board members--businessmen and clubwomen--were sympathetic. They had endured too much vexation from the Gallery. Clapp and his coterie had made Oakland the butt of jibes and ridicule. The Gallery was a sanctuary of immorality and vulgarity. To thwart Clapp's authority, the Board concocted a "reconsideration jury," which would have power to reject anything at the Gallery. This adroitly chosen board of censors was to consist of four laymen and three artists.

An Art Digest article (1 Feb. 1928) summarized the carnage:

> Because of the activity of prudes and meddlesome women, Oakland, Cal., which started out to be an example to the nation for broad-mindedness and sane method in showing contemporary art, both modernist and conservative, at its municipal art gallery, has fallen from its high estate and made itself a laughing stock. This result transpired after an art war raged furiously for more than a fortnight, during which the newspapers printed yards of battle news.

Through the five years of its employ Clapp's three-tier jury system had worked so perfectly that among artists of different tendencies a spirit of sportsmanship had developed throughout the entire Bay Area. The old antagonisms, the venoms, the jealousies had so completely dissipated that when a conservative committee of the Bohemian Art Club over in San Francisco barred the modernists, it was the conservative artists who rallied in protest.

As soon as the Library Board declared that it would institute the reconsideration jury, the artists of the Bay Area flew to the barricades, conservatives locked arm in art with the radicals. They declared they would, to a man, boycott the Sixth Annual Exhibition, which was the next show on the schedule. They also declared that they would not serve on the Board's reconsideration jury.

The artists immediately organized a Friends of Art League to fight for freedom of artists to exhibit without censorship. They pleaded for a united front and asked artists from Mexico to Vancouver to join. Many did. Maynard Dixon was in the vanguard.

Whatever else his character, Clapp was never a coward. He was beholden to the Board for his position; he had obligations to the Board. But he had a greater obligation to artists--all artists--and to what he considered the interests of the community. Buoyed by the support of the Friends of Art League, he unhesitantly carried his fight right into the Board itself. Its members supposed they were fighting for the good name of Oakland and the purity of its children. They slapped Clapp as hard as they could without dismissing him. They cancelled the Annual Exhibition.

Then an arch-conservative, Roi Partridge, a well-known etcher and head of the art department at Mills College, closeted himself with Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt, Mills' president. Mills had a large art gallery. They turned it over to the Friends of Art League for the Annual.

Not all the women were loony. Besides Dr. Reinhardt, prominent among the leaders of the Friends of Art League was Mrs. Rose V. S. Berry, chairman of fine arts for the National Federation of Women's Clubs.

Throughout the war the press was uniformly behind William Clapp. The Oakland Tribune put a strong case:

> Under many difficulties, in the face of discouragement, Mr Clapp of the Oakland Gallery has brought to this city the representative contemporary art of many lands. He has achieved for this city a reputation among artists and has given to the people here opportunities to study creative expressions old and new... There never has been a time when the modern in art was not attacked or decried, yet it is to the expressions of each age in art and letters that we turn for the record, upon which we judge and form impressions.

Argonaut critic Junius Cravens was vitriolic:

> George Jean Nathan says somewhere, "If a fine piece of work sends ten thousand morons to perdition, it remains nonetheless a fine piece of work, and that is all that the critic has a right to say of it." It is regrettable that a few of the meddlesome morons who are responsible for the new policy to be enforced at the Oakland Art Gallery could not have been, long since, included among the ten thousand.

The Friends of Art League changed its name to the Oakland Art League. Given charge of the emergency exhibition at Mills, they named three juries of four each. The progressive jury included Maurice Logan and Clapp and Brissey. The radicals had Worth Ryder, Gottardo Piazonni, and Von Eichman.

The Library Board, smarting from defeat at its efforts at censorship, delivered a parting shot through its president, W. G. Eggleston, who said, "For definitions of art we must, perhaps, go to the artists, but we can get a workable definition of indecency without consulting artists."

Towards Tragedy

For all the flamboyance of the Brissey-Hagedorn nudes dispute and the art war, Clapp was a timid man. Although it was the force of his position as head of the Gallery that glued The Six together and enabled them to expand their public through their annual shows, Clapp was careful not to exploit his position for personal gain. Modesty, too, held him down.

Jehane Bietry Salinger Carlsen recalled in 1967 that:

> I first met William Clapp while I was the editor of The Argus ...Clapp was especially interested in some of the younger painters of the area and was willing to exhibit their work...I mention this because one of the traits of Clapp was his independence of spirit. Yet he was quite retiring and was not given to facile elocution. At first meeting he appeared to be an unfriendly kind of a person, but once you had reached him his smile and his genteel manner won you over, and you knew then that under the bearskin was an authentic human being. He could get quite riled if you were a bigot--artwise--and tended to reject this or that form of art...He was often the object of criticism because of his broad views on art ...He always defended the right of the artist to express himself in whatever style he chose, and although a timid man by nature he held his ground and made public statements when required to do so which do honor to his memory.
>
> (Letter to Ginger Laky, 27 Sept. 1967)

Clapp and his friends had their behind-the-scenes adventures, but there was never any way to elude either museum responsibilities or public foibles. Clapp left an undated account of one reverie. I can see Florence Lehre being part of the "we"; perhaps there was no other:

Last night we ate too much toasted cheese and thereafter dreamed of many impossible, absurd things. For instance, we dreamed of an art gallery in a blood-thirsty Utopia where art was taken seriously and collecting regarded with suspicion.

It was a foolish gallery where nothing old or dead was shown unless it could be of use to the living. And mustiness was not associated with mastery. Its galleries were devoted entirely to works by the living. And there was no "standard" by which art was measured. Photography, surrealism, impressionism, cubism and redwood trees disported themselves at will about the place. The gallery was crowded by visitors who were behaving with most unseemly enthusiasm. In one place a group of academicians before a modernistic canvas was trying to resuscitate one of their number who had died from laughter. In another some long haired modernists were mopping up the floor with an elderly academician who cried loudly the while, "What we need is more and better Old Masters." But most curious of all--in one corner a number of artists of all persuasions surrounded a bald headed curator who, after being convicted of having purchased an Old Master, was about to be beheaded by an elderly lady artist. Her sword play was much hindered however by holding one of her paintings entitled, "A Yard of Pansies" beneath her arm. So she handed it to an ultra-modernist and finished her task with great neatness. All then immediately stopped quarreling and joined in singing...

If detractors occasionally left Clapp lonely and exposed, Florence Lehre was always near with some new encouragement, some new idea. Her job was to get the Oakland Art Gallery into the papers. This occasionally demanded Barnum hokum.

Oakland's late July ennui was shattered in 1927 with a story and picture splashed below the mast of the front page of the Tribune--eight inches deep and the full page across. The spread pictured Clapp--full body, from the pants bagging over his shoes to his bald head--not once but twice.

The headline:

FIVE FEET FOUR AND A FIGURE LIKE VENUS--THAT'S MISS OAKLAND

When it comes to feminine shapeliness, [the story ran] Ruby Smith, who has been picked as the prettiest girl in the East Bay, learned a lot about herself as well as methods of judging a girl's figure. Rulers and calipers and scales are used and Miss Oakland found out just how mathematical this whole matter is when she

> appeared at the Oakland Art Gallery for her measurements. And when W. H. Clapp, artist and director of the gallery finished, he learned that she has a neck just a quarter of an inch smaller than Venus de Milo and an inch and a half smaller than Faye Lanphier's, who was Miss America in 1925; that her bust is three-quarters of an inch larger than Venus...Here are a few views of Miss Smith as she is being measured by Clapp.

The pictures, reading left to right: Clapp, in knee length smock, using sculptor's calipers to measure the shoulders of Ruby Smith. Sitting on a high stool, she's in a one-piece bathing suit--all smile and legs. The next figure is of her again, standing, with a chart of all her measurements. Then Venus, with chart. Then Faye Lanphier, with chart. Then Ruby Smith again, standing this time, being measured by Clapp.

That was such pleasant Clapptrap that the magazine section of the Tribune another time ran a big head-and-shoulders cut of the director. and an even more beautiful girl:

> Like a machinist--Wm. H. Clapp, director of the Oakland Art Gallery, measures the fair head of Miss Louise Arvin, Miss Alameda, as though she were a machine rather than beauty queen. Whatever the calipers read, we'll wager they were exactly to the beauty scale.

There were pleasurable advantages in having Florence Lehre as Gallery publicist. Apparently she was not the jealous type.

In 1926, when the Blue Four Exhibition was inaugurated, William Clapp was secretary of the Western Association of Art Museums, which had members in 16. cities. In 1928 he became president. Meetings of the association rotated. Bill and Florence went together as the Oakland delegation and got their pictures in the papers.

Clapp by this time was nearing 50. Lehre was still in her twenties. Forget the bald head and black glasses--Clapp was a handsome man. In the newspaper pictures connected with his election he comes through as an elegant, carefully tailored individual, as precise and well thought out as a Signac Pointillist painting. He was, in fact, a fastidious man who

had a particular outfit for every occasion. Whenever he painted he wore a green eyeshade and smock. If he were going painting in the field, his case and equipment were carefully organized and complete, as they had been back in 1903, when he went down the St. Lawrence to Baie St. Paul. If he had carpentry work to do he put on a carpenter's apron with all the small pockets appropriately filled with nails, tacks, and tools.

Jehanne Bietry Salinger Carlsen sensed in Clapp a profound feeling of being a foreigner in his own land, and indeed papers continued to refer to him occasionally as a Canadian painter.

Photographs of Florence Lehre show traits similar to Clapp's. Her dark hair was bobbed and closely sculptured in the best fashion of the times. Like Clapp, she had a wit, but she must have been intensely more voluble.

Although it is unlikely that Clapp ever dictated what she would write in her reviews for the Art Digest or the Tribune, they understood each other so completely that their voices sometimes became indistinguishable. Florence was always defending the rights and needs of artists...if she felt them worthy.

Every year had its controversy. Some were relatively mild. In 1929 the purple bash on the American art scene was the sudden appearance of an 82-year-old artist named Merton Clivette. Actually Clivette was no come-lately. He had made his debut at the age of 79. George S. Hellman had introduced Clivette with broadsides printed in large black type on canary yellow stock exactly as if Clivette were a circus. Hellman sold 100 Clivettes, and the artist was made overnight. But Hellman went out of business, and Clivette was taken over by George H. Ainslie of New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Los Angeles.

The Oakland Art Gallery, ever willing to let voices be heard, agreed to show Clivette along with modernists which included Feininger. Clivette had just finished a 30-inch bronze statue, The Rail Splitter--a representation of none other than Abraham Lincoln--in the nude! Fortunately for the sanity of Oakland clubwomen and the Library Board, Ainslie did not include it in the Oakland manifestation.

The Clivette invasion gave Junius Cravens apoplexy all over the pages of The Argonaut. Florence Lehre had her own words to offer in the Tribune:

> Clivette is a world famous name. We have read wondrously laudatory criticisms of his paintings. New York and Paris have acclaimed him highly...We don't agree with the world. For, personally, we are of the opinion that Clivette is not an artist, perhaps not even a good faker...We must admire his grit, or whatever it is that prompts an octogenarian with such a strange and varied past--an inartistic past--to spread his "art" over the world, modestly proclaiming...that he is the greatest artist same world has ever produced. We ask, just as modestly, "Why blame the world?"

As usual Clapp had the last and incisive word. "The Oakland Art Gallery is not purchasing any Clivettes for its permanent collection. And if the gallery's showing of Clivette along with true 'moderns' has not taught discrimination to a goodly proportion of those who are exposed to them, then there is little hope for good influence through educational exhibitions in galleries."

The Crash of 1929 left California painters in economic shambles. In February, 1930 Florence lamented that the goose was so dead that she knew of no Bay Region painter gaining a comfortable living by the production of easel paintings.

Bill Clapp defined comfortable living as $200 a month.

Solutions were sought. Clapp decided that juries had carried the spear that killed the goose. Juries were out of touch with public taste.

Juries--even three tiered--were censors. And censors kept out of shows art that perhaps the public would buy. The public had to begin buying someone's paintings--it did not matter whose. Lehre was devastating in her critique of the situation, as she mirrored her lover's feelings.

> Today northern California is notorious as one of the worst art markets in the United States...That our juries are functioning harmfully, suicidally, must be evident to any thoughtful artist who is not blinded by fanaticism. They created dislike and suspicions of all art and artists...We have killed the goose that laid the golden egg...We have made ourselves parasites. We have become vagrants, with no visible means of support--ineffectives who have wasted our lives upon an "accomplishment" that we have made despised...We may admit that "Modern" art is the best art for men of today, but it gives to its devotees the fervor of the evangelist, the fortitude of the pioneer--and an intolerance so naive that it does not recognize itself. Today the "Modernists" sit in the high seats once occupied by the academicians. In them is power, our hope of progress, and the weakness that besets those who govern without the consent of the governed... A greater toleration of past, present and future is needed than is afforded by our jury systems.
>
> We...jumped through rhythms, self-expressions, and what-nots, to where we are today. And all we know about today is that today is different from yesterday. Tomorrow? Who knows of tomorrow? Not even ye--ye long haired and daring "modernists" who shock the living populace by your revolutionary practices. You may well prepare for annihilation. For tomorrow you will be branded as "academicians", and the day after tomorrow as "old masters". The day after that you will be "finished".

It was not a blind attack. She was furious over lofty pronunciamentos from pontiffs for the most far out, who certainly cut the ground out from beneath an established painter like Clapp. Clapp had been a revolutionary in Montreal and when he arrived in Oakland. His well had been a very deep one, and he continued to draw water from it all his life without ever making it seem to run dry and without becoming tiresome and repetitive. He had a way of looking at life and art, and if he could have lived two successive lifetimes he would not have exhausted the nuances and subtle beauties he wanted to exhort, neither in the open air landscapes, of which he was the master, nor in the unceasing rhythm of studio figure studies, of which he was the eternal lover.

Florence must have understood. If the public were ignoring Clapp as a painter, it was because of all the static--and because of the public's willingness to listen to the latest, a condition brought about by Clapp himself and his liberal exhibition policies.

Yet Clapp went right on serving those tastes which were swinging the public away from him. He concocted an idea to help artists cope. He decided to replenish the Gallery with a series of monthly no-jury exhibitions. Since the Art War, annual exhibits had been sponsored by the Oakland Art League. For these Clapp already had instituted from the start the no-jury systen. Any voice could be heard.

By the time its third no-jury exhibition was hung, August, 1930, Pacific Coast critics agreed that the Oakland Art League had "once more scored a notable triumph." The 100 oils, watercolors, and drawings ranged from realistic landscapes to Dadaist abstractions.

Though there may have been no juries, there were winners. The public--and leaders like Clapp--still suffered from a dumb disease that necessitated that somehow some picture in every show had to be certified as the best, that every show had to have a winner. Every visitor to the Gallery was asked to name the ten pictures which impressed him the most. Later a group of recognized artists would pass on the paintings, but each of their votes counted as ten and were added to the public's ballots. Thus the best pictures were selected. If the public votes were not backed by the connoisseurs, paintings could not obtain top honors; ncr could a painting which found favor only with painters and not the public. Nadio Lavrova of the San Francisco Examiner commented on the non-jury system as it actually worked out:

> A certain effort was made this year to group pictures of approximately the same artistic level. Otherwise, the paintings are allowed to speak for themselves. Some of them shriek. One

sees a realistic "Still Life" intruding upon an impressionistic landscape. A dadaistic composition is likely to find itself facing "A Stag at Bay" that belongs in a parlor of the eighties.

To see such paintings together, as Oaklanders have an opportunity of doing the year round at the monthly no-jury exhibitions, is for the average man first a revelation, and then an education...It has happened once or twice that popular sentiment has overwhelmed with votes a painting which was at its worst indifferent. But no glaring lack of taste was ever shown.

Clapp has been largely responsible for these radical inaugurations in the time-honored museum routine. The director is no believer in art juries. "A well-chosen exhibit usually rules out what people want to see," he maintains.

Far from leading to freak results, the monthly no-jury exhibitions, the only ones of their type in America, are becoming more significant as time goes by. Less and less bad stuff is sent in. The average level of the entries is slowly but unmistakably being raised. Oakland is doing pioneering work.

Seven months later the Oakland Gallery's own annual was held, and it was administered on the three-tier jury system. It was the biggest show ever. Florence Lehre wrote:

Judged from the gallery's ideal, the exhibition is a success, because it presents a cross section of most of the art that is being produced in the West. And it is a show that will infallibly displease every visitor by its inclusion of works that are offensive to the visitor's prejudices concerning what is and is not art. It is equally true that no one can fail to find much that will please.

For 12 years Clapp and Mrs. Lehre had stood side by side. They had negotiated shows, hung pictures, argued for budgets, fought for better space and lighting, built a public fire for a new museum, defended art, and battled foes. Clapp, onetime, wrote:

In every nation and every town there are those to whom I pay tribute--my friends, my tribe.

They ask little more of life than that they be permitted to pursue their ideals in peace.

And their ideals are always such as are selfless. They seek to widen the worship of beauty, to further the search of truth, or, in short, to do as much good as within them lies. They have no desire for wealth, nor even for pleasure, unless such may further their ideals. My friends, my tribesmen.

To all these I owe kindness, help, and interest. And all their faults are as nothing compared to their virtues. For they seek unselfishly. And I, also, seek.

These I understand, once I have identified them. And to them, I hope that I can speak even though my tongue be wordless.

All others are my un-friends. I do not speak their language, nor do they speak mine. They are not of my tribe.

It may be that there are more sincere teachers for my ideal than I; there are those who are more able.

To these I will bend the knee, be servant. But even though I be but servant--I will still be King. For I will be one of a tribe whose lowliest member is greater than the greatest king who is not of my tribe.

Yet I am lonely. For my tribesmen speak so little. Or perhaps, they speak: But I, thinking that I am one of them, am without the pale.

Gallery obligations forced Clapp into a painful dichotomy. As director he gave the gallery the best within him, but he was an artist, dedicated and passionate. In order to administer a public trust and to paint he was compelled to sacrifice all else. Some say that Mrs. Lehre ran the museum while Clapp painted, but this is an unfair simplification; nonetheless, it is probable that without her efforts his stream of painting might have been pinched to a trickle by museum demands. Whenever the museum did not monopolize him he painted. He needed the crowds and wide public the museum gave him and the personal intimacy that can never be extracted from institutions. He could speak of his tribe and mean the greater art community and the thousands who in a sequence of exhibits would come to his institution. This was the outside tribe, of which Mrs. Lehre was his vice chief.

Through the twenties, though, Clapp had a hard-core inner tribe--the Society of Six--who were heart and soul of his painter life, even after they became partially dispersed. One supposes that he painted his

studio pictures--the indoor figure studies--at night. But on weekends he was outdoors, painting all day and then spending the evening feasting and talking about the day's production with The Six. He needed their intimacy. Even though sometimes the others scarcely tolerated his hypothesizing-- they were basically intuitive--he needed them as sounding board, even when the returning echoes seemed faint or hostile. Though methodical Clapp was not a picture machine. He was not programmed mechanically to lay down Pointillist dots or impressionistic touches. Like all important artists he, too, was deeply intuitive, but his was a disciplined intuition, something as far from America's later action painters of the fifties as could be imagined. Still, he needed the hard professional appraisals The Six gave each other's works. It mattered not whether the fount of these appraisals lay in orderly postulates or deep inner vision.

In both separate and combined ways The Six struggled towards an ideal that Clapp saw as "an enormously high and craggy mountain whose summit is veiled in perpetual mists. Many paths lead up the sides, but no man has succeeded in following one of them to the top where lies a treasure, precious beyond the power of man to imagine..."

But as the Depression scattered The Six and art currents swirled off in different directions, a sorrowful Clapp could write:

> Waste has entered the practice of art just as it has entered all phases of modern life. We discover, we try until the effort bores us and then we discard in favor of something newer. If all of us were masters we might perhaps snatch greatness during our flitting from late to latest. Unfortunately most of what we know and are is the result of continuation of the effort of those who have gone before. One generation builds the foundation, the next adds a story and so on until a tower is built. But art has become too impatient to bother with foundations and we seek to soar on inspirational strokes of fortune. And so--impressionism was wasted. It added another story to the edifice of art, but the workmen have abandoned their jobs and instead of completing the building upon which they worked for a time, they have elected to start anew "from the ground up". Only here and there throughout the world a workman impressionist sticks to his job and tries to add a stone or two to the tower that started upward so hopefully.

With The Six all but gone (even though final dissolution still lay 10 years down history) Clapp needed a major adjustment in his inner tribe.

In Clapp's writings there is an essay on artistic temperament--of idealists vs. mercenaries, by extension the two great tribes of humanity. The mercenaries give their best efforts for material gain. The idealists give their best to paint a better picture, write a better story, sing a better song, devise a better instrument, or add a little to human knowledge. The idealist

> ...expects to sacrifice the ordinary things of life to his ideal and is astonished that his family and friends object to doing the same. He is still more astonished that he is accused of selfishness because of disregard of the little niceties. Little things such as the freshness of a collar, the materials of a suit, the year of an automobile, the amount of "dog" one can display, the size and comfort of a home, a wife and family, the length and happiness of life are of minor importance compared to the floating elusive something that must be endlessly pursued...The artist is convinced that art is the greatest thing in life and that he has or can have something of this greatest thing to give to the world. In order to attain the great he must sacrifice the less; and so pomp, ostentation, prosperity, the fine home and the little comforts that go with it, as well as love, marriage, and paternity are usually discarded..." (Italics added.)

Clapp, now 52, had sacrificed long enough: sacrificed love, marriage, paternity. He and Florence would be married.

But it was not to be. On September 22, 1931, Florence Weiben Lehre suddenly died. She was only 32.

Whatever his personal feelings, Clapp hid their depths in an official statement he prepared.

> She had thousands of friends--and a few, a very few, enemies... She was a faithful friend of every cause that she thought to be sincere, a bitter enemy of all intolerance, all art sham. And she liked nothing better than to battle for her ideals. But despite her faith in contemporary art...she was always ready to take the part of her conservative enemies if she felt that they were being unfairly treated by her friends of the modern movement. In losing her the West has lost one of its strongest advocates of breadth of mind in the consideration of art.

Final Skirmishes

Florence Lehre was dead, but Clapp's double career was far from over. Without her brainy drumbeating the Oakland Art Gallery dropped completely out of the columns of the Eastern art press. The Depression killed all chances of a new museum, and the plight of professional artists struck bottom. Four years after Florence's death Clapp sent a paper to a meeting of the Western Association of Art Museums in San Diego (presumably the Library Board could not afford to send him personally) suggesting how artists might earn $50,000 a year. From poverty to pinnacles!

That was enough to make a headline (15 Oc. 1935) in the Art Digest, which was itself struggling.

Clapp declared that artists should adopt the semi-monthly time-payment practices of the business world to recover from the tremendous decline in the purchase of paintings. He figured there were 25,000,000 families in the United States which ought (and could) purchase one $10 painting a year. This would give 5,000 artists in America a $50,000 annual income.

Clapp was quoted as saying, "In general, it may be said that an original painting, if it is of the best quality of which an artist is capable, represents at least a month of an artist's life, including in its cost not only the price of materials, such as canvas and paints, but transportation while in search of subjects, unsuccessful sketches and painting time spent in thought and study, model hours, etc."

Clapp figured that an artist could copy an original in a couple of hours, and these copies could be sold cheaply. To those who might charge that these would just as much be pot boilers as a cascade of crummy originals, Clapp had a telling answer:

> A too large output of original works made primarily to sell is ruinous to the artist, while copying on a somewhat smaller scale of the artist's own work is both easy and does no harm. True enough, it is just plain work that lacks creative joy, but even an artist would be willing to work a bit, provided he is well paid for it.

Clapp had offered the idea, in his words, as a "fantastic plan" in order to call attention more strongly to the possibilities of the market for low-priced paintings. He created the controversy he sought and was only too happy to need nearly a full page for clarification in the Art Digest (1 Jan. 1936).

He averred that under the present methods of art encouragement and art merchandising there was little hope for the artist who paints easel pictures.

> This being so, the necessity of some drastic change in methods is indicated. To confine ourselves to palliatives, such as futile little art clubs, petty sales galleries, dreary lectures to old ladies anent art appreciation, and to the thousand and one futilities by which we delude ourselves into the belief that we are doing great things for art, would be silly. At best they merely transform the professional artist from an honest workman into a mixture of beggar and "lounge lizard".

Clapp admitted that he did not expect anyone to take his $50,000 plan seriously. In fact, Clapp calculated, at $10 a throw an artist would have to paint 5,000 pieces per year, 13.68 per day, which at two hours each, would require 27 hours of work every day of the year. He was really thinking on a more practical level, $200 or so per month.

> Painting originals primarily for sale [Clapp hammered] means continual suppression of the new and personal in order to bring such work within the average person's very low powers of aesthetic appreciation. Painting "to order" from originals

> created for any reason that pleased their authors, would leave the artist completely free. If, in the course of his flights above the common understanding he occasionally created, as all artists do, things of greater popular appeal, it would be possible to repeat these works "to order" and thus gain the income needed for his support during still higher flights...For those artists who must paint pot boilers I still believe that such a plan would be more effective and less harmful than painting large numbers of bad originals...

Clapp concluded with a dour observation.

> No doubt there are many very young and hopeful persons who are still happy in the illusion that doing good creative work is a guarantee; that the financial situation of those who do will permit them to continue such work; that artistic merit will always be rewarded (financially); and that only the unworthy will fall by the wayside. To these, to those who have adequate private incomes, to the teachers who are comfortably placed, and to the artists who have found sustaining niches in commercial art, the matter of "boiling the pot" by means of painting may seem unworthy of encouragement. However, if these happy ones could visualize the wasted lives, the suicides, the half-starved struggles of the many who are quite as talented as themselves, they might be inclined to admit that our art institutions should devote more attention to the physical well being of our artists and less to floating on the clouds of pure and mostly ancient art.

There is no evidence that Clapp ever painted replicas. His suggestion was for others. He had his steady income from the city, and he supplemented this by free-lance restoration assignments. He was one of the fortunates. But he saw with perfect clarity the plight of others and helped them whatever way he could.

That is one of the reasons why Clapp never ceased tinkering with the system of juries and awards. The three-tier jury remained a basic fixture, but he repeatedly tried different devices for choosing winners and to keep the selections broad.

Another innovation was to invite a winner to come back the next year with a personal show.

After Mrs. Lehre died, her place as associate curator was taken

by Mrs. Gertrude Schroder. Three years later, in Woodland, Yolo County, near Sacramento, Mrs. Schroder became Mrs. William Henry Clapp. She had three teenage sons; so Clapp acquired an instant family, the posterity he had sacrificed. She was a woman full of enthusiasm and encouragement, and she worked alongside him until his death 20 years later.

Gallery affairs went on. Earl Rowland, director of the Haggin Memorial Galleries in Stockton, wrote to Clapp, "I suppose you have the Twachtman which I so much love hanging in your 'selections from the permanent collection'. How about trading me that Twachtman for four or five acres of Bierstadt canvas?" [Clapp replied, "I must emphatically refuse."]

Clapp's one-man shows were far less frequent than he deserved: in the Berkeley League Galleries in the Hotel Durant in August, 1930, and in the Oakland Art Gallery in April, 1944. It was during the latter that he gave a demonstration of Visualism, which he had spent his life developing.

He was an occasional participant in group manifestations such as the California State Fair in Sacramento. He was included in the California Building gallery at the Golden Gate International Exposition during 1939.

He kept notebooks, and under a heading of 14 July, 1939 there is a typical entry which describes his meticulous life-long concern for technique.

> This a.m. examined sketch of Feb.3 and found it excessively pale and chalky. Sketch was painted with palette knife using No. 224-A zinc white (i.e. ZW ground in equal parts of sun-thickened (14 days) linseed oil and spirit of turpentine.) When examined in studio the day after sketch was made, it appeared too "tight" and lacked vibration; also the focusing of vision on the tree trunk in the center was not

sufficiently unmistakable, or perhaps I should say that the progressive loss of definition from the visual focal point was not sufficiently marked to seem intentional. To remedy this condition titanium B (TiB or TB) white was freshly ground in cottage cheese (cc) casein and dragged and scrubbed over the surface with a palette knife. Brilliancy, vibration, and visual quality were thus improved but resulted in the chalkiness before-mentioned. Today lessened chalkiness and improved color by spotting with a green slightly darker than the lightest parts of the grass. The green was applied with the palette knife (the long straight one) and richness was improved thereby. (Sketch painted on a ground of 1 coat "casenite" white followed by 1 coat flat (lead) white tinted with cadmium red.) Remaining spots of casein white give a slight feeling that snow is falling; perhaps this would not have been the case had the white been tinted with cadmium red or alizarin crimson.

Before putting his pencil aside Clapp added a note:

Spent some time trying to think of an impressionistic painter for the intermediate jury of selection. No luck. Impressionism has become so rare that not even three avowed Impressionists are to be found for jury service. If they are so rare why bother with such a jury? Because it is needed to offset the utter concentration of the conservatives and the "moderns" upon form, a concentration that must discourage research in other directions. It is my belief that plastic form, solidity, weight, and the contours of objects are not necessarily the essential foundations of great art. Vision itself is more fundamental and the impressionists prove the value of light, tone, atmosphere, etc.

The next day Clapp returned to the sketch of Feb. 3:

Strengthened the red and yellow vibration in sketch without altogether overcoming a certain "white" feeling that remains too strong...using more completely divisionistic method--blue, green, and yellow spots, first with palette knife then with small, round bristle brush. Result good...the result is greater richness and depth of surface than is obtainable with less spotty methods and interpretation of vision is more satisfactory. The rough surface may gather dirt.

A couple of months later his work was

...Interrupted by silly "wild" party that kept me up nearly all night Saturday and made me too tired to sketch or work on Sunday. Tonight, Monday, have added a few touches of pure color and pure white which have extraordinary brilliance and purity because of contrast with their surroundings. The composition or painting is very incomplete but quite suggestive of a

method of obtaining a jewel-like quality of color at the point of visual focus. Must experiment by making a pure landscape sketch in broken color direct from nature, using a white toned with ivory black except at the point of visual focus. The method would probably be well adapted to woodland interiors or "close-up" barnyard subjects. Method would probably produce paintings more pleasing to the present generation than the neo-impressionistic manner used with pure white and pure color. 11 p.m. to bed early.

Clapp continued to paint and to supervise the museum, but the years were running out. During World War II he wrote poignantly:

> Being somewhat "under the weather" I have spent an afternoon or two sitting in our gallery # 2, surrounded by electric heaters and various items from our permanent collection of paintings. I have seen these paintings through 25 years of service as Director and according to my "modern" friends, to whom such things are worse than ratting dregs, should be thoroughly tired of them. Instead, oddly enough, they have acquired new, or at least, intensified virtues.

In these last years, when he could find no one of his persuasion, he felt lonely and forgotten. Occasionally the bitterness found way to the pages of his notebooks:

> Thursday. I can't paint tonight and if I attempted to do so I would probably spoil everything I touched. The day has gone badly. I am lonely and I wish that I had never returned from Paris. Had I remained there I would have had to endure the miseries of two world wars and I would probably had died in the first one, but there would, at least, have been the chance of survival and dwelling, or at least associating with my own kind--people who could share my aspirations and understand my language.
>
> In America the painter is an alien surrounded by enemies. He has hopes and dreams but rarely can find another to be interested in them. We are on a cash basis. The art student works and studies, believing in the lie that he has been told by society. Believes until he realizes the truth that our society is an enemy utterly incapable of understanding or appreciating his efforts or aims. Then he may join in chanting the social lie or, more probably, fade into nonentity .
>
> American art students who survive the first years of study are almost universally talented and countless numbers return potential masters from their "post graduate" studies abroad. They might be great, but never are. We have produced but one artist, Whistler, who has influenced development of the world's art and he spent his life abroad.

He was worried that he might be forced to retire at 70. In 1950 (he was 72) he was given a civil service reclassification to parttime curator. He asked to be placed on one-fourth time, and for his 10-hour week received $105 a month. As of Halloween, 1952 the Library Board terminated his services. For a two-year period he could have applied for reinstatement, but he was in poor health and did not protest. He died on April 21, 1954.

Under "Sunday Art" William Henry Clapp once had written:

> If art, if life, if any of the finer things have seemingly lost their savor, it means merely that we, ourselves, have lost savor. We are out of adjustment with the powers-that-be. And once repaired, we may soar up into the hills of delight as of yore, and, perchance, we may find as we soar a clear, cold shot through with jewel-like flecks of warmth that will sustain us when fate decrees that we must descend abysses whose profundities are beyond our present imagining.

As much as anything that might serve as his epitaph, or at least a a key to the mystery of his later years.

William Henry Clapp was a sublime painter, a beautiful painter. Whether painting landscapes or nudes (and he frequently put both together in delightful flares of fancy) Clapp commanded a brilliant sense of sun and shadow, of profound visual depth and vibrancy. Most often he worked with dominating tones of yellow, purple, and green. He was a genius of color juxtapositions. And although he was a meticulous craftsman, whenever he painted in the Pointillist he breathed a vitality into these works that is in sharp contrast with the dry mechanicalness of the French pioneers of this branch of Impressionism. His works are warmer, more vibrant, more emotional, more satisfying.

In no way can Clapp suffer from being hung next to a Monet, a Pissarro, or a Seurat. One ardent, wealthy collector, who hangs Clapps interspersed

with his Monets and Renoirs, describes his Clapps as "precious jewels hung on my well." That is perhaps the ultimate accolade, a judgment based on the quality of the work, not the nobility of the man.

APPENDIX

Visualism

Scattered through Clapp's notebooks and other writings are references to Visualism, a theory of art which he began developing during his European experiences. Most of these references I have not yet been able to date. The Manifesto issued at the opening of the first Society of Six exhibit in 1923 has already been given. The following four selections probably were written about 20 years later.

An Argument for Visualism

> In the beginning painting was probably devoted to the decoration of objects by means of dots and lines. Later came the representation of objects, not as seen, but as they were in substance, i.e. two-legged, four-legged, yellow, red or what not. All things were shown as of the same size, regardless of how far away they might be, and without shadows. The only exception being in the representation of a king, or other prominent person, who was given principality by making him larger than others. Later it was found that this could be achieved by placing (i.e., putting the king in the middle of the picture), by the use of converging lines, etc. Thus it will be noted that the fundamental characteristic of normal vision, focus, was the first necessity of composition.
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> In normal, interested (i.e. focused) vision, principality is its most pronounced characteristic. We see not only one thing, but one part of one thing and everything else is subordinated to it by the mechanics of vision. And this principal or defined point is at the centre of the field of vision. Thus we have the essential of pictorial composition, not as a rule of picture making of which truth must be fitted, but as the most obvious essential of fact.

Again, unity, the relation of all parts to a whole, completeness, finality, are all included in this truth of vision. The eye sees one point clearly and everything else with progressively less definition toward the edge of the field of vision and in this way each part in this field is related to every other part, and to the whole. Thus, we have unity and variety.

The Theory of Visualism

The two most important facts of existence are light and vision. Without them the preservation of thought, thought itself, all progress and even human life would be impossible. They are the greatest subject open to the painter.

All vision conforms to the same simple rules of which the basic one is that only one point can be seen clearly at one time. From this point there is a progressive loss of definition outward to the limits of the field of vision.

Also, there is uninterested or unfocused vision, in which all things are seen vaguely. This form was well expressed by some of the French impressionists. It is the way in which all see until interest awakens. Vision then gathers to a focus and any moment of this gathering is a well composed legitimate subject for the painter.

As all human beings see in this way, all undergo an unrealized training in composition and when the artist departs too far from the possibilities of vision the spectator experiences a vague dissatisfaction based upon subconscious training. From this fact by a system of trial and error throughout history have come the accepted rules of composition, such as principality, unity, balance, etc. All basic characteristics of the act of seeing, vision.

Each medium is better fitted for the expression of certain qualities than others and this expression is their proper field, from which they should not depart, save when some minor borrowing from another field may strengthen expression of the qualities for which they are best fitted.

For instance weight and solidity are visible and therefore do not belong in the field covered by painting. They do belong in the field of sculpture, where they are best expressed. Here also, in lesser degree, belong volume and the delicacies of modeling.

Neither does pattern for the sake of pattern come within the field of the easel picture. The bas relief, mosaic, and

mural decoration express it much better, while the depiction and recording of objects and their minute details is best done by photography.

As for stories, social comment, etc. these are best handled through the medium of literature.

There remains vision itself. Its expression is the true field of painting.

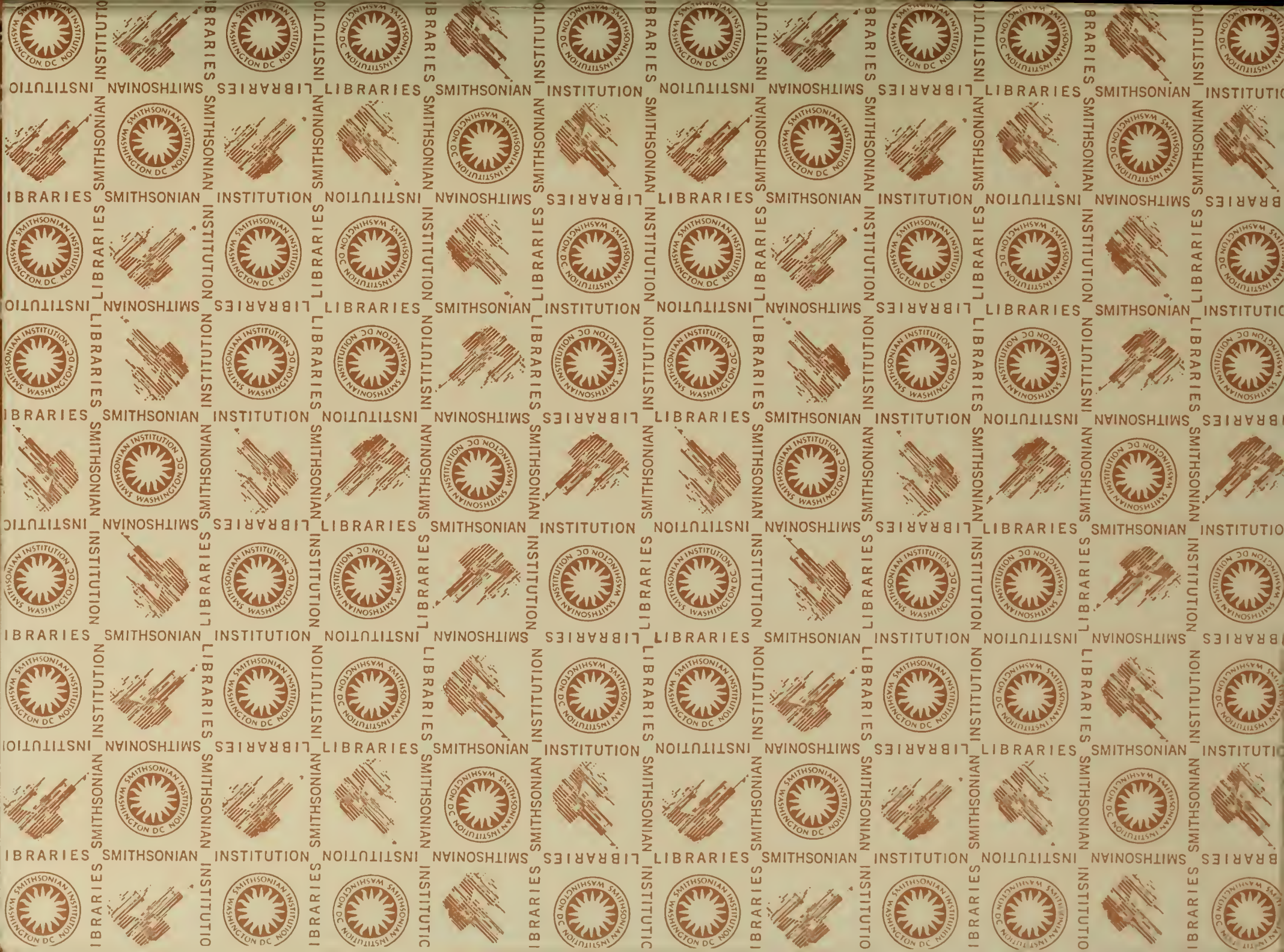
Visualism and Picturial Construction

Simple as the theory of Visualism is, it is not easy to explain the widespread and definite effect it has upon pictorial construction. Possibly the feature of graduation of definition toward a focal point is the essential fact that is so difficult to understand. Not the fact as a theory, but the fact in its startling extent and all-inclusiveness. Probably most artists think that they accent the chief point of interest rather strongly, but it is not until one attempts to paint as one actually sees that one realizes to what degree this can be done before it is even visible to the observer.

Impressionism

The impressionism of Monet and of those who believed as he did, has been imperfectly understood by most of our painters and critics, who accuse Monet of spending his life with the surface of things. In reality he was one of the few who devoted themselves to the whole instead of to the surface; he did not paint "the grass and the flowers and the trees one sees bathed in sunlight," but tried to paint the light, the color, the atmosphere, and the act of seeing nature as a whole, whereas Cezanne and his followers merely paint the substance of accidents, the form of objects.

Why form should be considered all important is difficult to imagine. It is equally difficult to understand why it should be considered more desirable than other qualities. Personally I would much prefer to live in a world without form than in one without vision or air and it would hardly bother me at all to live in a world without definite form.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